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To Be a Work is to Set up a World

Into the Woods with Heidegger

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Video Article

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VIDEO ARTICLE

To Be a Work Means to Set Up a World: Into the Woods with Heidegger

Falk Heinrich with Thomas Wolsing

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This video article is one outcome of a collaborative project with artist Thomas Wolsing in the summer of 2016. The collaboration was video recorded (FPS, head mounted camera). The footage was thereafter edited into a video article that documents emerging dimensions and themes of this project. My ambition for this collaboration was to experience and discover interlacements between, on the one hand, art theory (epitomized by some sentences of Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art") and, on the other hand, artistic and physical-constructional work in building a land art piece. The video article presents dialogues and monologues *in situ* that circles around the problem of how to bodily and conceptually integrate art theory and concrete artistic practice and the dependence between and incompatibilities of art theory and art making. It shows the experienced integration of physical and discursive actions that, in the moment of performance, is elusive and refutes any ethical assessment. The video is in Danish with English subtitles.

Keywords: Art-informed inquiry; art theory; art practice; Heidegger; performance; land art

VIDEO ARTICLE

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STILLS FROM THE VIDEO ARTICLE





VIDEO ARTICLE TRANSCRIPT

[00:10]

“To be a Work means to set up a World”

Into the Woods with Heidegger

by

Falk Heinrich with Thomas Wolsing

This video article is one result of my collaboration with The Danish artist Thomas Wolsing.

An academic analysis and contextualization of this experiment can be found in my written article 'Into the Woods with Heidegger' (Heinrich, 2018).

[00:29]

[Falk Heinrich:]

Nå, nu er jeg her. Hune skov, noget der hedder Gateway. Her kan du se den røde bil og Thomas Wolsing, som er kunstner og som tager masser af disse plantepotter ud af sin bil. Ja, det er jo et pilotprojekt, vi er i gang med, som går ud på, at der er en forsker, mig, og en kunstner, det er Thomas. Vi skal samarbejde om at lave et værk og et oplæg. Og det er jo lidt spændende. Vi er kommet lidt sent i gang, dvs. at konceptet er egentlig lavet, det har Thomas lavet. Jeg har ikke været involveret i konceptudviklingen. Men mit samarbejde med Thomas går ligesom ud på, at jeg hjælper Thomas med at installere og bygge og opstille værket, land-art værket, her midt i skoven. Hvad hedder værket, Thomas?

Now I am here, Hune forest, also called Gateway, in North Jutland, Denmark. Here is Thomas Wolsing and his red car and ... he is the artist and is taking a lot of plant pots out of his car. Yes, this is a pilot project I, and we are commencing it here. The purpose of this project is to initiate a collaboration between an artist, Thomas, and a scholar, that would be me, aimed at the creation of an artwork and an academic presentation. Exciting. We have begun our collaboration a bit late, meaning that the founding concept of the artwork has been done by Thomas. I was not part of the concept development process. My collaboration consists of helping Thomas build and install this piece of land art here in the middle of the wood. What is the piece's name, Thomas?

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Det hedder, Erhernogen, Parentes: still-life, nature morte

It's: Erhernogen (Istheresomebody) Parenthesis: still-life. Nature morte.

[Falk Heinrich:]

Ok. Jeg vil gerne dokumentere mine oplevelser, mine erfaringer og jeg snakker også en gang i mellem, snakker med Thomas, stiller nogle spørgsmål, har nogle refleksioner eller prøver på at nedfælde, bare mærke hvordan det føles af hjælpe Thomas med at opstille værket. Så, har jeg glemt noget her? Som sagt, jeg er forsker og jeg forsker inden for kunstteori, dvs. jeg har læst en masse bøger med teori. For eksempel har vi her liggende noget der hedder Martin Heidegger "Kunstværkets oprindelse". Jeg har egentlig tænkt mig at læse op, en gang i mellem, eller tage nogle citater, passager, som jeg nu synes passer og så reflektere lidt over dem i forhold til det jeg er i gang med, nemlig at hjælpe Thomas med at opstille værket. Ok, nu kan jeg se ... Thomas, at du har ... Ja, og så har jeg glemt at sige, at jeg selvfølgelig håber på at min teoretisk forståelse på en eller anden måde bliver influeret af den praktiske del, det at opstille noget, at håndtere noget, at føle materiale, at føle form; måske kommer også associationer, som jeg ikke ville have haft, hvis jeg kun havde læst hans [Heideggers] tekster.

Ok. I want to document my experiences of the process. I will talk during the process, also with Thomas, asking questions, expressing reflections and how it feels to bodily help Thomas build the piece. Have I forgotten to say some things? As already said, I am a scholar doing research within art theory. I have read a fair bit of theoretical books, such as Martin Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art". I was thinking that I will read some of his paragraphs, some of his sentences, once in a while in-between, when I feel it would fit, read them and reflect on them a bit in relation to what I am doing in the

moment: concretely helping Thomas construct the piece. Ok, now I can see that you, Thomas, have... I have forgotten to say that I am hoping that my theoretical understanding will in one way or another be influenced by the practical part of building, wielding something, to feel the material and form, to feel, hm ... maybe there will be associations, which I might not have had if I only had read his [Heidegger's] text.

[03:28]

[Falk Heinrich:]

Hvad skal jeg nu lave, Thomas?

Ok, Thomas, what should I do?

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Vi skal stille de potter ind på det område her. Og det, jeg har tænkt på er, at vi skal stille disse potter op ved side af en bregne, sådan at ... Altså, mit oplæg til projektet er noget om, at Gateway, Blockhus, det er jo sådan et smukt sommerhusområde. Ganske vist er det her jo industriskov, men vi kalder det natur.

We have to put these pots in this area over there. We should put each beside a fern. It is like that, that, my idea for this project was that Gateway, Blokhus, Hune, a beautiful area with summer cottages. Obviously, this is an industrial, planted forest, but we call it nature.

[Falk Heinrich:]

Ja.

Yes.

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Men så er det jo sådan, at den der Landshape festival er i et område som er smukt. Det er et rekreativt område, hvor turister gerne vil komme, derfor har man ligesom ønsket, at det skulle være her. Og så er det også sådan, at jeg er meget fascineret af disse bregner og det her område, som er mos. Mos og bregner er ligesom nogen af de første vækster, der har været her på jorden, fra livets oprindelse. Når man så tager en bregne og kigger på den, noget som står i jorden, det vil man sige, er naturen. Men lige så snart man ser noget, der står i en potte, så er det jo kultur, en del af civilisationen. Derfor har jeg tænkt mig, det vi skal gøre, er at tage disse potter her og så skal vi simpelthen grave bregnen op, satte den ned i en potte, grave et hul og satte potten ned i det igen. Så når vi gør det, gør det mange steder, så er det noget, der kan gøre publikum nysgerrig, for at sige, hov, her sker noget anderledes. Lad os forsætte i det spor. Det er det, vi prøver at lave nu faktisk.

It is so that this Landshape festival is situated in a beautiful surrounding. It is a recreational area, where tourists like to come, and that is why they wanted to be here – the festival. And furthermore, I am very fascinated by these ferns here, and moss. Moss and ferns were the first plants on the earth – from the origin of life. When you look at a fern like this one, as long as it is planted in the earth, is it termed nature, but when it is in a pot, is it called culture, part of civilisation. That is why I thought what we will do is dig up the ferns, plant them in the pots, widen the hole in the ground and put the pots into them. When we do this at many spots, it can provoke the public's curiosity – yes – that is to say, something is happening here, something different. Let us continue with this idea.

[Falk Heinrich:]

Og så ved man ikke rigtigt, om potten kommer ud af jorden.

And we do not know whether the pot is coming out of the earth.

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Lige præcis.

Precisely.

[Falk Heinrich:]

... eller om den er blevet sat ned i jorden.

... or whether, it is put into the earth.

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Så, igen det der med det naturlige, der er menneskeskabt, på grænsen af natur og civilisation, det synes jeg er spændende og det er det, jeg godt kunne tænke mig at arbejde med i projektet.

So, nature is human-made, at the border of nature and civilisation. I think that is interesting and I was thinking of working with this in the project.

[Falk Heinrich:]

Er du tilfreds med opstillingen sådan her, eller?

Are you happy with the placement now, or?

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Jeg er ikke sikker.

I am not entirely sure.

[Falk Heinrich:]

Men allerede nu er der jo dannet et rum, som er adskilt fra skovens øvrige rum og den der koncentration af disse potter betegner noget, peger på et sted, som er anderledes, på den ene eller anden måde.

Already now there is a space that is distinguished from the surroundings, from the other spaces of the forest. Merely the assembly of these pots here points at and points out a place that is different in one or another way.

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Jeg kunne godt tænke mig, at prøve det er lidt fristende, at grave en op og så se.

Let us try to – it is tempting to dig one up.

[Falk Heinrich:]

Du har sørget for en helt ny spade.

You have come with entirely new spade

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Simpelthen, du.

Yes indeed.

[06:57]

[Falk Heinrich:]

Ja – det er ligesom at grave i sin egen have.

Yeah – It is like digging in one's own garden.

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Det er det, det lige er.

Absolutely.

[Falk Heinrich:]

Skal jeg grave lidt mere?

Shall I dig more?

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Ja, ned lige her. Fin sand, hvad?

Yes, in there. Fine sand, isn't it?

[Falk Heinrich:]

Ja, sand.

Yes, sand.

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Fantastisk. Så prøver vi at stille den tilbage igen, nemlig. Lige sådan der. Der er lige til en dekorationsforretning. Lad os se. Det er spændende. Det er meget sjovt, er det ikke?

Fantastic. We'll try to place is back again. It's almost like it's in a shop for decorations. Haha. Let's see. Exciting. It's quite amusing, isn't it?

[Falk Heinrich:]

Ja.

Yeah.

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Det er meget virkningsfuldt, er det ik'?

It's quite effective, isn't it?

[Falk Heinrich:]

Ja.

Yes.

[Thomas Wolsing:]

At man tager noget, gør noget med det og sætter det tilbage igen, så er det fuldstændigt modificeret og alligevel, og så videre. Og jeg har tænkt meget på, om man skulle værne sådan en potte, men jeg synes dog, på en eller anden måde, at det forbinder jo igen bregnen og mosset med det her, det er ikke fremmed, vel?

One takes something, manipulates it and puts it back again; then, it is completely modified and still, and so on. And I have thought a lot about whether I should plant a pot, but in a way, I think, one associates the fern and moss with this here. It's not strange, is it?

[Falk Heinrich:]

Nej.

No.

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Det eneste, der er fremmed, er potten og potten, det betyder kultur, hvordan man kultiverer...

The only thing that is strange is the pot. And pot signifies culture. How one cultivates

[Falk Heinrich:]

Ja. Men når vi er hjemme i vores haver, så har vi også masse potter, mange har i hvert fald og man oplever det meget som kultur, men også som natur, som er anderledes end byen og det urbane rum, som har en anden logik og en anden atmosfære.

Hm yea. But when we are in our gardens, we have a lot of pots, at least many have, but one experiences them not as culture, but more as... also as nature, as something that is different than the city and urban space that has another logic and atmosphere.

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Det er spændende, det der. Hvordan starter civilisationen, starter det et sted, ik'os', en kultivering af et område her.

It is quite exciting, when there begins — civilisation or when begins this site — a cultivation of this environment.

[09:06]

[Falk Heinrich:]

Jeg synes stadigvæk at det er fascinere, som jeg sagde før også, at man godt kunne have den association, at disse potter kommer op af jorden og netop ikke er blevet sat, at de vokser op lige som disse bregner vokser op. Og det vil jo så i hvert fald stille spørgsmålstejn ved den der skelnen, den distinktion mellem natur-kultur, som vi er vokset op med. Også det, at vi laver sådan noget, 'gør' kultur, er jo vores natur, på en eller anden måde.

I think it is quite fascinating, as I said before, that one can make the association that these pots come out of the earth and are not put into the ground. They grow out of the earth like ferns. I want to question the distinction between nature and culture, one that we are socialized into. Also, what we do, that we craft culture. To generate culture is our nature, somehow.

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Den er flot. Den står fint.

That is pretty. It looks good.

[Falk Heinrich:]

Nu slukker jeg igen her.

Now, I'll switch it off.

[09:48]

[Black]

[Falk Heinrich:]

Nu er jeg er igen og nu ser jeg hvad Thomas har lavet i går og i forgårs, hvor jeg ikke har været her, fordi jeg ikke kunne. Men han har bygget sådan en trækonstruktion her, med fliser nedunder. Det ligner rigtig meget en terrasse. Og så kan man også se her ... det tror jeg bliver husets grundrids. Nu er jeg lidt, ved ikke rigtigt, hvilken passage vil passe. Måske skal vi bare læse lidt igen. Noget med jord, det synes jeg er meget interessant. "Værket lader jorden være en jord" (Heidegger, 1994, p. 54). Han [Heidegger] har den der modsætning mellem verden og jord. Og jord er det indhyllede, det gemte, det man ikke kan sige noget om. "Jorden er det væsensmæssigt sig tillukkende. At frem-stille jord vil sige: At bringe det ind i det åbne som det sig tillukkende" (Ibid., p55).

Jorden er også en bevægelse. Det ikke materie, vi snakker om her, mos, det her underlag. Men jorden er mere også symbol for noget der tillukker sig, der ikke giver sig til kende. Og hvis man fremstiller jorden, så fremstiller man det, at den ikke vil fremstilles, den tillukker sig, den bevægelse af tillukning. Ligesom her, vi har husets verden; hus der bygges, også hvis man bygger et hus i forfald, så bygges det alligevel, man opstiller en verden, den verden vi lever i, den forståelsesverden. Og så har vi skovbunden, jorden, som vi egentlig ikke rigtig ved hvad er. Jo, vi ved biologisk set, kemisk og sådan, selvfølgelig, men alligevel, er der noget, der bliver gemt, hele tiden, der lukker sig til. En hemmelighed. Det mørke, de mørke – ikke de mørke kræfter – men der sker et eller andet, som vi ikke har adgang til. Vi har kun adgang til det, når det kommer op. Og så har vi jorden. "Værket lader jorden være en jord." "Værket lader jorden være en jord." "Værket lader jorden være en jord." "Værket lader jorden være en jord."

Now, I am here again and I want to see what Thomas has done yesterday and the day before. I wasn't here, I could not. He has made a wooden construction with tiles under it. This appears to be a terrace. And then, here, one can see – I think this will be the outline of the house. Now, I am a bit ... I do not really know which paragraph would be fitting. Maybe we should just read a bit, again, something with earth, which I find very interesting. "The work lets the earth be an earth." He (Heidegger) has this opposition between world and earth and earth is the covered, the hidden, one cannot say something about. "Earth is essentially self-secluding. To set forth the earth means to bring it into the open region as the self-secluding." (Heidegger, 1993:172) Earth is also a movement, it's not the material we are talking about here – moss, soil, etc. – but earth is also a symbol of something that hides, that does not want to be identified. And if you want to present earth, you will also have to present that earth does not want to be presented as something. It's a movement of disclosure, all the time. Here, we have the world of the house, of a house that will be built – also if you build a house in decay, it is built

after all it constructs a world, the world we live in, the comprehensive world we live in – and then there is the forest floor, earth, that we do not know. Yes, we know it in a biological sense, chemical and this kind, of course. But nevertheless, there is always something that gets hidden, that is closed off, a secret. The dark, not a dark force, but something we do not have access to. We only have access to it when it surfaces. And then we have the earth: “The work lets the earth be an earth.” “The work lets the earth be an earth.” “The work lets the earth be an earth.” “The work lets the earth be an earth.” “The work lets the earth be an earth.”

[Black]

[12:30]

[Falk Heinrich – Two recordings simultaneously:]

[Falk 1:]

Det vi ikke kender, lukker sig til hele tiden, har ikke åbnet sig endnu, gemmer sig, bjærger sig. Måske er det også det, jeg gør her. Jeg kaster mig ud i noget som, set udefra, er noget så dumt og så naivt. Jeg føler mig også lidt dumt i det, at jeg går rundt her, i et kunstværk, som endnu ikke er et kunstværk, som er et kunstværk i sin vorden, et kunstværk, der opstiller en verden og repræsenterer en verden og jeg snakker til mig selv, idet jeg prøver på at forene Heideggers ophøjede tanker om kunstværket, der opstiller en verden og lader jord være jord. Og jeg blottes mig selv i min uvidenhed, min uformåenhed at bringe disse to ting sammen: filosofien, teorien, sproget og så det her.

That what we do not know, undisclosed at all times, it has not yet opened itself, it hides, conceals itself. Maybe that is what I am doing here, I venture into something that seems so stupid and I also feel quite stupid going around here in an artwork that yet is not, a work of art to-be, an artwork

that creates a world, represents a world while I am talking to myself with the intention to combine it with Heidegger's elevated thoughts about the work of art that sets up a world and lets the earth be earth. And I expose myself, I expose myself due to my ignorance and inability to combine these two things: philosophy, theory, language and ... this here.

[Falk 2:]

Filosofiens verden, som lever af det luftige, det begrebslige og som giver mening inden for sit eget begrebslige system, og han snakker om verden og jorden og tinget og tøjet og sådan noget. Det er ligesom man skal begive sig ind i den der verden og leve der, ånde der for at få mening. Men kunstværket, eller det arbejde med kunstværket, det at installere noget, at tage disse potter og bære dem derhen, og sådan noget, der er meget ... hm ... der er kroppen, der arbejder, der bærer noget, der føler skovbunden. Her er ikke disse høje tanker, disse filosofiske tanker giver ikke rigtig mening. I hvert fald er dette forhold ikke særlig klart. For mig ... jeg føler mig ligesom ...

The world of philosophy lives with the ephemeral, the notional and gains meaning within its own notional system. He talks about world and earth, and things and equipment and things like this. One has to enter, go into this world and live there, breath there in order to be able to extract meaning. The work of art, or rather, to work on or install something, to take those pots and carry them that is ... that is very ... it's the body working, carrying something, feeling the forest ground. There aren't any elevated thoughts. Philosophical thoughts do not make sense here. In any case this relationship is not very clear to me, I feel like ...

[Falk Heinrich:]

Det bliver en terrasse, en træterrasse.

It is going to be terrace. A wooden terrace.

[Black]

[13:40]

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Men jeg tænkte på, rent praktisk, vil jeg ... lige nu. Hvis du kunne fundere denne terrasse, bare nogle enkelt steder.

I am thinking, on the practical side, I ... right now. If you could lay the foundation, only at a few spots.

[Falk Heinrich:]

Men disse fliser bliver? Eller vil du have dem væk?

But those tiles remain? Or do you want to have them removed?

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Nej, de bliver, det hele skal bare blive liggende. Der kommer brædder på her.

No, they stay. All this remains. There will be planks here.

[Falk Heinrich:]

Så du vil bare have at det ikke forrykker sig.

Ok, you only want to secure it against displacement.

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Ja.

Yes.

[Falk Heinrich:]

Ok.

Ok.

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Du ved, når der kommer tyve mennesker til åbningen.

You know, when there are going to be twenty people standing on this.

[Falk Heinrich:]

Så du vil have nogle pinde ind her og her?

Ok that means, you want to have some sticks here and there?

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Nej, jeg har sådan nogle pæle, ligesom dem derover, bare tykkere. Og så banke dem ned her og så skrue dem ned der.

No, I have poles, thick poles over there. So, we hammer one in here and fasten it with a screw here.

[Falk Heinrich:]

Ok, fint nok.

Ok fine.

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Og ... dum, dum ... i hvert hjørne. Og så har det ligesom sat sig, haha, ik'os'?

And ... dum, dum.... in each corner. And then, you know, it is stabilized. Haha. That's it.

[Falk Heinrich:]

Ok. Super. Det bliver også dejligt at gøre noget, fysisk, så at det ikke kun bliver på koncept plan og filosofisk plan. Jeg har været her for, en halv time og ligesom, tog Heidegger lidt op igen, spekulerede lidt. Men det er jo meget på filosofiens præmisser, ik' ...

Ok. Super. It will be good to do something physical. Something physical, not only on a conceptual and philosophical level. I have been here for half an hour and took Heidegger out again and contemplated a bit. But that is based on the premise of philosophy. Well it is not...

[Thomas Wolsing:]

Jo, jo filosofen. Jeg synes jo det hænger sammen. Når jeg laver noget, jeg plejer også at tænke, og nogen gange tænker jeg lidt for meget over det, og nogen gang ... åk, så skal man bare gøre noget.

Yes, yes, philosophy, I think that there is a relationship, because when I do something I think about it, sometime I think too much about it. And sometime, one just has to do something.

[Black]

[15:04]

[Falk Heinrich — hammering poles, repeating one Heidegger quote:]

“Værkværen vil sige at opstille en verden.” (Heidegger, 1994, p. 51)

“To be a work means to set up a world.” (Heidegger, 1993, p. 170)

[16:23]

[Black — then action continues]

This is the closest relation between practical building work
and one core sentence of Heidegger's philosophy
of the work of art, I have experienced.

It's an embodiment of words and embodied actions
becoming signs. This rhythmic conjunction melts both
the semantics of action and word into pure performance,
into energetic transformations of air to muscles to sounds
and movements of an earth-opening pole,
back to my hands and arms.

This is an opening of my human earth,
where my momentary body, all my perceptions and thoughts
are moulded, transformed and again hidden away.

This is my human earth, where pure but blind energy
amalgamates with joy, sorrow, movement, sense,
breathing, indoctrination to form my perception of
this work of art to-be and to create my world.

[Black]

[17:06]

[Video and image of completed land art work]

[17:54]

[Black]

[Falk Heinrich:]

*Nu er jeg her igen, halvandet år senere. Januar 2018. Der er ingen rød bil, men
det er det samme sted. Og skulpturen – land art – er der stadigvæk. Det ser
lidt trist ud. Ah, plantepotterne, de er der ikke mere, der er kun skårene tilbage.
Terrassen. Tilbage til jorden, den store transformator.*

Now, I am here again; one and half years later, January 2018. There is no red
car, but it is the same site. And the sculpture – land art – still is here. Looks

a bit sad. Ah, the plant pots aren't there any more, only the potsherds. The deck. Back to earth, the great transformer.

[19:14]

For a written treatment of this material, responding to Wind, Gadamer, Fischer-Lichte, Shusterman, Barad, and other theorists, please see my article: Heinrich, F. 2018. 'Into the Woods with Heidegger' in *Journal of Somaesthetics*, Vol 4, 1. Aalborg: Aalborg University Press.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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